

February 12, 2007

Business and Labor Committee

House Bill 146

THE CONFEDERATED SALISH AND KOOTENAI TRIBES

Testimony of  
James H. Steele, Jr.  
Tribal Council Chairman

Thank you to the Business and Labor Committee for scheduling House Bill 146 and for Representative Ms. Joey Jayne for being the sponsor. My name is James Steele, Jr., and I am the Chairman of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are a proponent of House Bill 146. Last summer the State/Tribal Relations Committee requested all of our Tribes to develop a gaming bill that could assist the Tribes in Montana to further economic development of gaming. This bill meets the request of the Tribal/State Relations Committee, as this bill would allow for the expansion of forms of games within Indian Country. For example, this bill would authorize tribal governments to provide games such as slots, craps, roulette, dice, etc.

Most of our Tribes in the state of Montana suffer from extreme unemployment rates—most of the year our Tribes are at 50% unemployment, while the rest of the state is at less than 3%. Most of our Reservations are located in isolated, rural, non-tourism areas of this state. We need a viable option to stimulate our economies. Whether a person is morally opposed to gaming or not—Indian gaming has been a proven successful economically viable tool throughout Indian Country. Indian gaming has provided other Tribal Governments the ability to provide for basic needs such as housing, health care, elder care, education, and employment—we would like our Tribes in Montana to obtain that same opportunity. Expanded forms of games for Indian Country would allow our Tribes to utilize an economic tool that has assisted other Indian Nations in building their economies, and likewise benefit our local and state economy as well.

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 was intended to accrue to the economic benefit of Indian Nations. Indian Nations are still the poorest of the poor and as stated earlier we remain the highest unemployed population in Montana and the United States, simply because we do not have jobs to offer our tribal memberships. We do not see gaming as the be all end all; we see it as an opportunity to grow our economies and to diversify our economic bases, something that will help all residents of our reservations.

Therefore, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes request members of the Business and Labor Committee to join Ms. Jayne and the State/Tribal Relations Committee in their support of House Bill 146. Thank you again for your time and consideration.